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EDWARD PALMER THOMPSON:
HIS STUDY OF CLASS AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

by

MAHBOUBEH KATIRAI

A Thesis
submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at
The University of Windsor

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AUTA VITURUS

Mhhboubeh Katirai obtained her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Pars College in Iran. In 1978, she attended the University of Western Ontario and later pursued her Master's degree in Sociology at the University of Windsor.

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ABSTRACT

The way Sociologists have studied working class and working class consciousness has been generally non-dialectical and ahistorical. This has been partly as a result of the lack of the Sociologists involvement with working class life and struggles which has led to works of theoretical speculation on who composes class, what is class consciousness and how it is formed.

This thesis relies on the thoughts of Edward Palmer Thompson, a libertarian socialist activist, to provide a better way to understand the working class and its consciousness. Thompson's dialectical analysis defines class as a structured process which happens in people's relationships. He views thinking and being as a unity which means that man's life and labour are not divorced from man's thinking. Accordingly, he considers the study of the subjective and objective aspect of class formation as crucial to a better understanding of class.

He views class as being influenced by many factors and rejects the idea of bourgeoisified workers in modern society because it is an ahistorical study of class. The historical study of class, however, will show its ascendant and descendant development in which class struggle has taken various forms over different needs. Through such study, Thompson has shown the working class self-activity and has ruled out the leadership role of intellectuals or parties in

such activity. The role of intellectuals is limited to their involvement as catalysts and their support of working class struggle.

Through this involvement and applying a dialectical view to the study of class, intellectuals will best understand working class self-activity.

To my father, with deepest affection.

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INTRODUCTION

From a Marxian perspective the question of class and class consciousness is the central issue when one is concerned with social change, since a fundamental transformation of society into Socialism can only be achieved by the working class. However, the definition of class has been a quite difficult one to handle. Who composes it? What is class consciousness and how is it formed? Marxists, depending on how they see the relationship between the base and the superstructure, have defined class as being determined by either the economic, the political or the social structure. Other sociologists, in turn whether Marxist or not, have defined class as a structure having definite characteristics arising from either income, education and/or occupation or combination of them. This way of defining the working class has been problematic. For instance, the definition of working class based on occupation excludes many people who do not fit into these definite categories. As M. Glaberman questioned "in which class is the guy who runs a gas station, puts in 80 hours a week, pumps gas, gets his hands dirty, but also employs half a dozen people and makes a profit?" (Glaberman, 1976; 25).

One approach uses income as the basis of belonging to various classes and claims that in post-capitalist societies such as the United States, the blue collar workers earn as much as white collar workers and the middle class. Consequently, they are not militant or revolutionary. This idea of "the affluent worker" views the increase in working class wages ahistorically and without reference to workers as consumers as well as wage-earners.

Another way of handling class has been to define it as to the degree of status, prestige or sets of values which people hold in the hierarchy of the social system. Furthermore, conflict is viewed as being between interest groups to obtain prestige and power. These studies establish a series of attitudes and behaviours as being stereotypical of the middle class or the working class. Here, we have a simplification of working class life, experience and activity.

Within Marxism, Structuralist Marxism in its analysis has been anti-humanist and has overlooked the importance of experience and practical struggle of the working class.

These approaches, whether within or outside Marxism are non-dialectical, they reduce Marx's Dialectical Materialism to an economic determinism, wherein the economic system determines other social factors. Dialectical Materialism is neither voluntaristic nor deterministic but it is an interconnectedness of numerous factors, of

contradictions and negations. So that "...men make their own history but they make it under conditions determined and handed down to them from the past." (Tucker, 1978:85). Any dialectical study should contain both subjective and objective factors in the making of social structure.

Edward Palmer Thompson, a Marxist historian and activist, has come up with a coherent, multifaceted analysis of the British working class and the development of its consciousness as it is influenced by economic, political and cultural factors. His analysis counters the economic determinist view of defining and studying class and class consciousness and challenges the notion of a non-revolutionary bourgeoisified working class. According to Thompson, class and class consciousness is a "structured process" which "happens" in people's interaction under the objective limitations of the social structure, the resultant class structure and consciousness may follow a process of ascendant, descendant, discontinuity and breaks in its development which can be studied in a historical perspective. Thompson's analysis of class and class consciousness is partly based on his understanding of Marxism as a "general model" with no "laws" of development which understands that as man changes the material conditions he is simultaneously changed by this activity (Thompson, 1960:20-26). Thompson has been also involved with working class movement and political activities and has relied on this perceived

experience in his analysis of working class life and its self-activity.

The purpose of this thesis will be to provide some possible solutions to the problems of working class studies by understanding how Thompson has approached the study of class. We will discuss how he came to see class self-activity and the development of its consciousness. Furthermore, we show how Thompson's involvement as a Socialist activist has contributed to his understanding of the working class. To achieve this goal I have divided this thesis into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the nature of sociological theories and their way of handling class. The first section, deals with how class was studied ahistorically. The second section reviews the different Marxist perspectives and their way of analyzing class, and the third section suggests a possible way of handling the process of class and class consciousness.

Chapter two, is a social and biographical background of Thompson's method of thought through a description of his practical and theoretical training as he was involved with different groups and journals.

In Chapter three, I have concentrated on the way Thompson studied class as a historical and a structured process and how he comes to see class consciousness and the way of achieving Socialism as a result of the self-activity of the working class.

Chapter four deals with a possible way of analyzing class and class consciousness with particular reference to Edward Palmer Thompson's praxis as a historian and an activist.

In the conclusion, I provide a synopsis of the highlights, together with a further analysis of Thompson's similarities to Marx's way of handling class experience and class struggle.

So as to provide as thorough an exposition as possible of Edward Palmer Thompson's thought on class and class consciousness, some works have been emphasized more than others. This is based on their relevancy or irrelevancy to our subject. The principle sources for this study have obviously been Thompson's own work which span over a forty year period. Due to the enormity of this work, I have had to decide whether to study Thompson using a chronological basis or in relevance to the topic; I have chosen the second approach in order to avoid repetition.

CHAPTER ONE: CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS IN SOCIOLOGY

1. Class as an Ahistorical Category
 - Functionalism
 - Conflict Theory
2. Marxist Perspectives of Class
3. New Developments in the Study of Working Class History

I. CLASS AS AN AHISTORICAL CATEGORY

This chapter intends to demonstrate how the most widely accepted theories in Sociology have dealt with the issue of class and class consciousness. We will then pose an alternative way of studying class in modern industrialized societies. In order to make it feasible to discuss this issue, we have divided these theories which study class and class consciousness into Consensus Theory, Conflict Theory and Marxist Theory.

Functionalism is a consensus theory which uses an organic system in its description of society. It proposes that society is similar to an organic system in its mechanism comprised of interdependent parts whereby these parts have specific roles to play. Society survives when the needs of a social system are met by its parts. As long as society survives, it means that society is successful in meeting its needs. Accordingly, classes fulfill different functions and are interdependent to each other in their functions and contribute to the preservation of the social system. Functionalism says that the source of inequality in a class society stems from the potentials and capacities of people and not from the social system. Socializing people into their expected roles and rewarding them to continue these

roles are important in order to maintain the social system. However, the rewards are not equally distributed among people because there are jobs which are more important to society than others. This inequality, however, is functional to society where people strive harder to obtain higher rewards be it power, money or status (Cuff & Payne, 1979: 35-54). The division of labour, therefore, is functional because it is widely found in all societies and it is necessary because it is functional for the society. Functionalism views societies as integrated wholes which socialize and mould people.

Kingsly Davis and Wilbert Moore have analysed social stratification using the Structural-Functional framework. They wrote that they dealt with "systems of positions not...the individuals" in this analysis (Davis & Moore, 1945: 242). They substituted an abstracted notion of class "position" with real men and women in the study of social stratification. Consequently, they derived a series of universalistic propositions. They came to see certain rewards as being widely accepted and effective vehicles to motivate people into taking social positions. Those positions which were "functionally important" to the social system or those which "require special talents or training", would get more rewards (Davis & Moore, 1945:244). Based on this analysis, they perceived that social stratification was necessary which actually promotes those who were talented and

had received their positions in society either through their "inherent capacity" or "through training".

The lack of analysis of the element of power in the Functionalist study of class has been widely criticized. Alfred Hunter, in his criticism of Davis and Moore wrote that they emphasized the importance of various "material, recreational and symbolic rewards as the sine quo non of social stratification" (Hunter, 1981: 36-37). It was not discussed why such rewards came to be important in society and why people strove to obtain them.

Furthermore, Davis and Moore overlooked that the powerful elements of society had the means to reward or not reward people and consequently maintained the unequal rewards of a class society. This was based on their desire to perpetuate the social system. Therefore, once these social positions were occupied, the mere fact of "their importance and dependence on scarce skills gives their incumbents the power not only to insist on payment of expected rewards, but even to demand larger ones" (Wrong, 1959:323).

The functionalist explanation of class and inequality in a social system not only justifies the status quo by overlooking the power factor but also overlooks the existing resistance and opposition to the social system. People in Functionalist Theory seem to be a group of oversocialized individuals who are structured to play their roles and contribute to the maintenance of the social system.

Functionalism, therefore, deals with the division of labour, and class is seen as a necessary part of society playing required roles, and not affecting change in the system. The status quo is rationalized by this sociological perspective when it merely tries to deal with order and consensus and the way to maintain them.

Gouldner wrote that the conservatism of this perspective is that it

"treats...institutions as given and unchallengeable in essentials; proposes remedies for them so that they may work better, rather than devising alternatives to them; foresees no future that can be essentially better than the present, the conditions that already exist; and explicitly or implicitly, conceals acceptance of our resignation to what exists rather than struggling against it."
(Gouldner, 1970: 332).

Functionalism not only is conservative but also promotes conservatism by emphasizing the need for adaptation and conformity.

Conflict Theory:

This theory views social structure as embodying an internal contradiction between classes which is the source of change in the social system. Conflict theory was developed as a reaction to Marxism and yet has embodied some of Marx's ideas. One prominent individual whose work has been drawn on this perspective was Max Weber who understood Marxism as a "monocausal theory" and as an "economic determinism" in explaining social structure. Weber wrote that the basis of power in a social system is not only economic but also

political and based on prestige (Coser, 1976: 313-319).

In his analysis of class, Weber wrote that a class is a group of people with the same class situation. This class situation is in fact their market situation which determines which class they belong to (Gerth & Mills, 1972:141). Weber wrote that in a capitalist system the various levels of skills were a divisive factor in the working class. Weber perceived of class as a group of people who merely shared the same market situation and may come to a class consciousness. The furthest Weber had come to perceive of a class experience and class consciousness was when he wrote that "the economic and political solidarity of workers might overcome their initial fragmentation of interests. But solidarity of this kind is weakened by religious or ethnic differences." (Bendix, 1974: 339).

Furthermore, class conflict takes place when the "unequal distribution of life chances comes to be perceived as not an inevitable fact" and where "the class enemy is a group in visible and direct economic competition." In addition, the intelligentsia "supplies clear and comprehensible goals for their activity" (Giddens, 1971: 165-166). Class relations are not the pivot of Capitalism but merely one characteristic of a highly rationalized society.

More recent developments in Conflict Theory deal extensively with the idea of the post-industrial society. This concept first appeared in the writings of Daniel Bell

where he wrote that in the industrially developed countries economy was coming to be based on service and not industry, therefore "...what counts is not raw muscle power, or energy but information". In addition, he wrote that "the central person is the professional...well equipped by his education and training to provide the kinds of skill which are increasingly demanded in the post-industrial society." (Bell, 1974: 91-95). Consequently, Bell wrote that those workers that were left had gone through the process of embourgeoisment where the class had adapted to a "middle class mass consumption life style" (Hunter, 1981:40). The working class adhered to middle class values and material benefits lost its revolutionary potential. Contrary to Marx, working class consciousness is not a "revolutionary" but a "conflict consciousness". Dahrendorf claimed that in capitalist society this consciousness demonstrates itself in trade unions which do not challenge the social system in a revolutionary sense. Another theorist, Giddens, wrote that trade unions "do not bring seriously into question the relations of authority in industry since the former is in the economic realm in capitalism, while the latter is in the political" (Giddens, 1971:46).

Lockwood and Goldthorp have analysed the change of attitude within the working class and showed how workers had striven to obtain middle class status and prestige. Furthermore, Dahrendorf believed that in the "post-

industrialized" societies unskilled workers were diminishing in number and the working class was more aware of their differences than their common interests. Consequently, conflict and competition were seen as based on interest groups rather than classes. That is, this conflict was made "...orderly patterned, predictable and controllable" (Cuff & Payne, 1979:82-83). Nevertheless, Dahrendorf defined "social classes as organized or unorganized categories of people who share manifest or latent interests arising from their positions in the authority structures in which they find themselves." (Cuff & Payne, 1979:82-83). So, class conflict happens as a result of these authority relationships.

One very crucial aspect lacking in Dahrendorf's study is that it overlooked that "conflict of interest provides the basis for latent or manifest class conflict in the long run" (Hunter, 1981:42). So even though Conflict Theory may be an alternative to the conservatism of Functionalism in studying class, it views class as merely a structure based on authority, power and prestige. Conflict is traced between groups and individuals to obtain the above rewards.

E.O. Wright wrote that to say a "...relationship is contradictory implies that there is an intrinsic antagonism between the elements (positions) determined by that relation". In this sense, contradiction must be distinguished from conflict, so when it is said that "two classes are in a contradictory relationship to each other,

such opposition is viewed as a necessary consequence of the very relationship which defines the classes" (Wright, 1979:22). This clearly describes the class related aspect that is missing in Conflict Theory, where the existing conflict between classes does not have a deeper root than to obtain or maintain status, prestige or power.

II. Marxist Perspectives on Class and Class Consciousness:

Marxist interpretation bases its analysis of social structure on the notion that the relation between classes is one of dominance of one over the other and that this is essentially exploitative. There are two Marxist schools which have been very influential in recent decades in studying class and class consciousness. One has been influenced by a French philosopher, namely Louis Althusser, and the other by British historian, Edward Palmer Thompson.

Louis Althusser wrote that "since the 1930s Marx's early works have been a war-horse for petty bourgeois intellectuals in their struggle against Marxism". This "new interpretation of Marxism", Althusser wrote, was "developed by many communist intellectuals, liberated from Stalinist dogmatism by the Twentieth Congress." (Althusser, 1979:74). He saw a major epistemological break between Marx's early and later works. He said that with The German Ideology, Marx and Engels laid the foundations of a scientific theory and with Capital they began to study social structure in a scientific

manner. Furthermore, Marx's "scientific discovery" is that "...the real dialectic of history...is not men who make history, although its dialectic is realized in them and in their practice, but in the masses in the relations of the class struggle" (Althusser, 1977:164-168).

Althusser's understanding of Marx's Historical Materialism as a scientific method is that it was based on a study of social structure without reference to what Althusser called "philosophical trivialities". These trivialities were the Hegelian ideological influences on Marx's early works. Althusser, further wrote that even though history is a process, for Hegel it is a "process of alienation...(which) does not have man as its subject" and where "history is not the alienation of Man, but the alienation of the Spirit, that is, the ultimate moment of the alienation of the Idea" (Althusser, 1977:182). He continued that the notion of history as "...a process without a subject...undoubtedly represents the greatest theoretical debt linking Marx to Hegel". In addition, in Hegel's analysis, Althusser wrote, "The only subject of the process of alienation is the process itself in its teleology" (Althusser, 1977:183).

Althusser, in his more recent work particularly his self-criticism, wrote that "History does not have a subject in the philosophical sense of the term, but a motor, that very class struggle." (Althusser, 1975:99). Later in the same essay he wrote that Marxism "affirms the primacy of

contradiction over the process" and that is what makes "Marxist science a revolutionary science" (Althusser, 1975:130-131).

Even though Althusser recognized history as a process of contradiction and class struggle, he nonetheless wrote of class struggle as follows: that workers "adopted" Marx's "scientific theory and made it a weapon in their revolutionary class struggle" and that this is the "union of the Labour Movement and Marxist Theory" (Althusser, 1975:152).

There are shortcomings in Althusser's understanding of Marx and social structural analysis. His understanding of Marx's work as exhibiting an epistemological break between the later and early work negates the dialectical side of Marxism and tries to make it into a philosophy that bases itself purely on analysis of structure leaving man and his needs out of the equation. Because of this shortcoming, Althusser's understanding of Marx is theoretical and an overly abstracted study of social structure.

Furthermore, when Althusser spoke about man and his role in history he only mentioned the term "masses". The concept of masses is a tidy way of handling people in an abstract way. What he overlooked when dealing with abstracted ideas was that when Marx wrote his works, he based them on real empirical events and people. It is definitely because of this methodology that Marx's works are dialectical

where they are tested with reference to historical events. So Marxism is a useful theory not because it is a "good" theory but because it reflects the historical process.

Another crucial criticism is that studies, such as Althusser's, with this misunderstanding of Marx overlooked the fact that class struggle is the pivot of Marx's work. The reaction of people to an exploitative social system is ignored by Althusser and the mode of production and economic structure are treated as a given, where people do not participate in its making.

Simply to make an analysis of the mode of production, or to locate the working class in the social structure, is not a complete study of the historical process and overlooks the subjective factors in class formation. The subjective factors in the study of class are: (1) class experience, and (2) their interaction with other classes.

If these subjective factors are lacking in the study of class, then classes seem to be empty places which have to be filled with people. This priority of abstraction over people leads to the assumption that classes have an existence separate from people and their relationships. Nicos Poulantzas Althusser's student and follower in his analysis of class wrote that we should understand "...the empty places into which individuals are sorted" (Poulantzas, 1978:62). If classes are considered to pre-exist class members, then we have collapsed class relations into class situation.

Edward Palmer Thompson has defined and studied class and class consciousness dramatically different from most Marxists. His understanding of class is more subjective. He says class experience affects class formation. Class is defined as a structured process that distributes people in society. In turn, people affect this process by their behaviour within the class structure. This behaviour is a result of many factors, one of which is past experience.

The nature of this process requires a historical study of class in order to disclose how class "happens" over a long period of time. So, to study class at any given moment of history would only give one a static picture of class behaviour.

III. New Developments in the Study of the Working Class History

In recent decades, social history has come to be considered as a useful way to better understand class. Thompson stated that there should be an intermarriage of Sociology and History. This should not be "...the wooden taking over of unprocessed terminology and categories from one favoured school of Sociology, and imposing these upon existent historical knowledge. Where this is done, it is damaging to both disciplines". (Thompson, 1966:280). So, social history, is not complete dominance of one over the other but an intermarriage of fields which would assist both disciplines in furthering their potentials and posing new

questions for them. In studying class and class consciousness, Sociology can benefit from a historical perspective in understanding working class activity as it develops.

Prior to the development of social history labour history in Europe and North America used to concentrate on collecting "facts" and constructing universal laws, then reporting on how "...interaction between great men and the institutions they created, modified or resisted" (Jones, 1972:98). When they did deal with labour, it was with "...what to do about the workers" (Hobsbawm, 1974:371). They did not deal with who the working class was and how they were formed, but rather how to have them under control.

In Britain, there were three approaches to Labour Studies: one was the perspective which emphasized the education of the workers to adapt and adjust to their situation in society. The second was the Fabian approach which criticized inequality and the laissez-faire economic system for its inefficiency. They called for greater state intervention. The third approach supported a welfare state in a liberal framework which rejected Imperialism but not Capitalism (Jones, 1972:104). These perspectives, however, paid little or no attention to working class everyday life and its formation as a class. They studied the labour movement, the institutions of the class as opposed to the class itself.

In America, too, labour studies had a similar history; they were closely tied in with economic history. One group of economists were educated in Germany, and another group of economists were influenced by British historians. In 1892, at the University of Wisconsin, there was an attempt to build an interdisciplinary field with a strong historical tendency in the economics department. John R. Common and his student Richard Ely founded the American Bureau of Industrial Research (Hann & Kealey, 1977:93). (It was also called The Institutional School of Labour). This interdisciplinary area of social science is now called Economic History.

In Canada, Gregory Kealey followed the course of development of Social History and he found it to be in some ways similar to the patterns already found in America and Britain. MacKenzie King, who was educated in Labour Economics, founded the Labour Gazette and initiated a number of agencies to do Canadian labour research. He also attempted to initiate a project on Canadian Labour History similar to Common's in America (Kealey, 1979:966-97). The works being done on Labour History in Canada were divided by Kealey into two schools: one of these was the "institutional school", influenced by the John R. Common's perspective. This school presumed that "cultural and ideological aspects" of the workers' lives were merely reflected in their trade unions. Besides this oversimplification, this approach overlooked these workers who did not belong to trade unions.

The second school is the "political school" which considers the workers' contribution to reform or revolutionary politics. The works of the writers within the Communist Party of Canada, namely those of Charles Lipton and William Bennett are of this category. But this school ignores the experience of the workers and the periods when "working class militancy was low". Another trend within this school deals with the "relation of workers to third party social democracy". Kealey believes that each of these two schools handles the different aspects of working class life divorced from other aspects of their lives (Kealey, 1973:I). Even though there was some Labour History from a Marxian perspective in Britain, Canada and America, these works did not study the working class itself and its self-activity.

Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class defined class as a "structured process" that "happens...in human relationships over a long period of time (Thompson, 1968:9-10). So, class and class consciousness, do not happen in a vacuum. Class is a social, historical and economic process, and class formation takes place when people handle their "experiences" in "cultural" ways. The influence of this work was widespread and challenged the purely structural or voluntaristic view of class and class consciousness. It also questioned the widely popular economic determinist analysis which overlooked working class experience and self-activity in its struggle. Thompson studied the working class

itself as opposed to studying them in their organized class movement, their party or union affiliation.

This analysis also came to challenge the studies which perceived the formation of class consciousness as coming prior to class struggle. Class consciousness in the Thompsonian explanation is not something attached to the class situation, class struggle is a response to the class situation. In this process working people come to see themselves as having common interests and only then they become class-conscious.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the ability of sociological theories to deal with class as a "structured process" has been questioned. It is true that all the theoretical perspectives have not and could not have been considered in one single chapter but I chose theories which have specifically dealt with class. The purpose was to show that these theories were conservative and static in their handling of social interaction or have dealt with the working class only in its institutionalized activities. This analysis was not limited to some conservative sociological theories, but was also to be found among those who were radicals and Marxists. The Thompsonian approach is proposed as an alternative which takes account of the interconnectedness of the various factors in the formation of class and class-consciousness over a long period of time. His analysis rejects a static

classification of classes and proclaims that class and class consciousness happen through struggle and self-activity.

Finally, a Thompsonian approach challenges the manner in which some Marxists study class as only being economically determined. In sum, Thompson's view is that classes are social and historical phenomena and they "happen" in social relationships.

**CHAPTER TWO: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THOMPSON'S PERSPECTIVE
TOWARDS CLASS AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS**

I. The Communist Party of Great Britain

- The Communist Historians' Group
- Reasoner

II. New Reasoner

III. New Left Review

IV. European Nuclear Disarmament

One of the significant aspects of Edward Palmer Thompson's approach to the study of class and class consciousness is that it is empirical and is derived from his close involvement in the practical struggle for Socialism. One characteristic that stands out in his work is the strong relationship between the development of his political, social ideas and the experience he gained as a socialist activist and historian. He has been involved with a variety of political groups and one of the marked features of his work is how he has integrated both the historian and socialist activist parts of his life. There have been times when he has given priority to one over the other but he has never stopped being both. In this chapter I intend to show the development of his work by following his involvement with various political groups. In doing this, I hope to show how this has relevance to his study of class and class consciousness.

I. The Communist Party of Great Britain

It was not until the mid 30's, after Hitler became the chancellor of Germany that the Communist International realized the growing danger of fascism and its threat to democracy (Lerner, 1982: 158). As a consequence, during 1935-36 the democratic and liberal groups joined forces with the Communist groups against fascism.

Edward Palmer Thompson joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1942 when he was eighteen. He was one of many who joined the Party during this period in the belief that Communists were a widely organized group who were actively protesting fascism. The young Thompson's involvement with radicalism was no doubt influenced by his home life where "imperialism was always regarded as the arch enemy" and the "leaders of the Indian liberation movement" such as Nehru met (Palmer, 1981:12-13). Besides, his older brother Frank had already joined the Communist Party and had "fought with the partisan movements of southern Europe" and later "was executed by Bulgarian Fascists" (Palmer, 1981:33).

E. P. Thompson's academic education in history began at Cambridge where he was elected president of the University Socialist club. He later joined the army in 1942 and fought as a tank troop leader in Northern Africa, Italy and Austria. (Palmer, 1981:33). His fight against fascism was not over and when he returned to England he edited The Fascist Threat to Britain. He obtained his degree in history and in 1947 visited Bulgaria and the Partisans with whom his brother was fighting. In the summer of the same year, he volunteered in the construction of a one hundred and fifty mile railway in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Later he expressed this experience as a "supreme example of...self-activity" of the partisans. People had volunteered from different parts of the world to participate in this task, without the supervision or

management of any company (Marho, 1976:12). Thompson came to grips with a first-hand understanding of this self-activity and how these people came to conceive of themselves as having a common goal and interest in the process of this construction.

Thompson's understanding of working class history and the concept of working class self-activity was nurtured through both his political activities and his association with a group of historians within the Communist Party of Great Britain who studied the working class in a unique way. This group was called The Communist Historians' Group.

The Communist Historians' Group

This group was officially formed in 1946 and became one of the most flourishing cultural groups within the CPGB. They aimed at establishing a tradition of social history which did not exist before that date. They based their work and analysis on the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Other influential literature in their work was Maurice Dobb's Studies in the Development of Capitalism and the Black Jacobins by C.L.R. James, then a Trotskyist (Hobsbawm, 1978: 21-48).

Meanwhile, the atomic disasters of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 were followed by the expansionism of the Russian army into Eastern Europe, and U.S. intervention in Greece in 1947. Soon the gradual extension of the grip of the superpowers was aimed at having more control over the

Pacific. The Truman Doctrine committed the United States to intervene in any revolution if it was considered to be Communist. United States rearmament took place to secure strategic areas while Russia hoped for an equal position in the Pacific. (Birchall, 1974:58-60). In addition, America added to the tension between the two countries by forming the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949. The outstanding characteristic of the period after WW II was the rising tension of the Cold War, especially between two superpowers whose strained relationship became tangibly demonstrated in the Korean war.

Thompson, realized the importance of opposing the Korean War and helped to develop a peace movement in West Yorkshire. He was elected to the Yorkshire district Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain. This peace movement was mostly an alliance of people who were expelled from the Labour Party, traditional Left Pacifists, trade unionists and Communists. Thompson, as a Socialist activist, never stopped his involvement with the peace movement

While a member of the Historians' Group, Thompson taught adults who were mostly in the labour movement in order to "learn something about industrial England" (Marho, 1976:13). Once more he involved himself by learning from workers and consequently emphasized the importance of their experience. In this process of interaction the "appropriate

balance between intellectual rigour and respect for experience" is obvious (Palmer, 1981:34). It was through his reading that he came across the work of William Morris, a British activist, poet, craftsman and theorist. He saw Morris' analysis as being still relevant to British life. Thompson wrote a voluminous book on Morris' life and ideas as a romantic and revolutionary.

Morris, Thompson wrote, was deeply influenced by Marx and was in a way the first English speaking Marxist who put up a persistent fight against "bourgeoisdom and philistinism" as an activist and a writer. Thompson wrote of this fight as a "moral rebellion, stemming from the romantic tradition" (Thompson, 1955:9). It was Morris' "moral critique of society" and "Marx's economic and historical analysis" which Thompson saw as being closely related and complementary to each other. Thompson constantly praised the activism of Morris as a socialist. It is evident from Thompson's life and activities that Morris is a cherished model of his.

With Morris in mind, Thompson integrated his experiences of war-service, his teaching and learning, to master his craft as a historian. Eric Hobsbawm of the Historians' Group describes the mood and atmosphere of the Group as one of "physical austerity, intellectual excitement, political passion and friendship" (Hobsbawm, 1970:25). As a group within the Communist Party of Great Britain, the

Historians' Group was bound to certain pressures from the Party but still enjoyed some degree of freedom.

The prescribed policy of the Communist Party of Great Britain for the Historians' Group was to have it apply Marxist theory to historical events and criticize non-Marxist historical work. Contrary to this designated task, the Group followed the radical-oriented labour history tradition which existed prior to the Party's foundation. The Historians' Group "deliberately not acting as a Party group" had attempted an alliance with non Marxists who agreed with them on the way labour history was to be studied. Briefly, the issues were the British labour movement, reformism and working class pauperism. The Historians' Group's studies did not impose theory upon the historical events as was prevalent in Stalinist studies (Hobsbawm, 1970:33).

In the worst years of the Cold War, the alliance of the Marxists and non-Marxists in the formation of the journal Past and Present became an inspiration; even though the differences prevailed and disputes persisted. This was an encouragement as much as an indication of the necessity they saw in the union of liberal and radical forces to fight a common cause on a common front. This move was not authorized by the British Communist Party.

Meanwhile, Thompson was learning how to be both a socialist historian and an activist. He came to learn his craft among comrades who did not stop doing social history

because of Party policies. The contradiction between the advocated British Communist Party line to do labour history and the way the Group took up this study, obviously brought to the minds of the Group the degree to which the Party line was irrelevant to the British working class. The Party had a preconceived idea about what the working class consciousness should be and how this consciousness should be achieved by the Party. As Eric Hobsbawm wrote, it was basically the understanding of the Party that

"the advance of Socialism...would not necessarily be the unaided work of the Communists, but it would certainly depend on the efforts of a single united worldwide Communist movement organized round the Soviet Union" (Hobsbawm, 1973:111).

As was discussed, this centralized policy was not welcomed by members of the Historians' Group. On the other hand, the rising tension of the Cold War, the revelation of Russia's possession of the hydrogen bomb and its approval by the British Communist Party, added to the doubts which became stronger especially after the expansionist measures of Stalin into Eastern Europe.

The Reasoner

Even though the oppressive situation in Russia under Stalin was known and discussed by many, it was not until February, 1956 that the horror of Stalin's crimes were revealed by Khrushchev himself. He denounced the cult of personality, advocated by Stalin in which the supremacy of the leader had to be maintained. In his second speech to the

Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was attended by the Communist Party leaders from all around the world, Khrushchev gave a detailed report of Stalin's crimes and his oppressive regime (Birchall, 1979:84). The impact of these events alone was enough among the members of Communist Party of Britain to start questioning the Stalinist measures and the British Communist Party policies.

The official response of the British Communist Party was to rationalize the actions of the Kremlin. A few days later the Historians' Group, dissatisfied with this reaction, met on April 8th of 1956. John Saville of the University of Hull wrote that unless the CPGB admitted that the measures taken by the CPSU were wrong, the Party would lose its relevance for the British Labour Movement (Wood, 1959:196). Thompson, then teaching at Leeds University, wrote on the decline of controversy within the Party: that "criticism and self-criticism" was merely a "jargonized form" where the leadership of the Party was the center which defined the limits to which controversies can expand (Wood, 1959:169).

Thompson, Saville, Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm, all members of the Historians' Group, participated in this opposition. Unable to get their articles published in the Party press, Thompson and Saville decided to publish a journal, The Reasoner, in July 1956. Their first issue had quoted Marx by saying that: "to leave error unrefuted is to

encourage intellectual immorality". Their purpose was to initiate a journal which could discuss the events of that year and the future of Communism in Britain.

The suppression of the uprising in Poland, the intervention of the Russian armed forces in the Hungarian revolution and its bloody aftermath led to a more widespread and overt rebellion among some Communist Party members. The Reasoner Group, consequently, demanded that the British Communist Party take action in calling the Soviet troops from Budapest, reconsider its policies in relation to the Russian Communist Party and its support of their interventionist measures. In response, they were warned by the Political committee of the Party to cease publication. This was ignored, and consequently led to their resignation from the British Communist Party.

The suppression of the Hungarian revolution was over on November 6th of 1956. In the last issue of The Reasoner, Thompson wrote that Stalinism was merely a "scholastic exercise which searches for formulations" which correspond and are "correct" in relation to text but not to life (Thompson, 1957:107). For the Historians' Group it became tangible that the British and Russian Communist Parties could not deal either theoretically or in practice with working class self-activity. In writing "Through the smoke of Budapest" the spirit with which Thompson and his comrades resigned from the British Communist Party was clearly worded.

Quoting Thomas Mann, Thompson wrote: "We hope to grow more dangerous as we grow more old" (Thompson, 1956:2).

II. The New Reasoner

In continuing their opposition, Thompson and Saville published the first issue of the New Reasoner in the summer of 1957. They called their journal a "democratic communist opposition" which had world-wide readers and supporters. They intended to "rehabilitate the rational, humane and libertarian strand within the Communist tradition". This Communist tradition was not to be considered as a closed and "self-sufficient system" but one that could be a creative tool in the Socialist tradition (Thompson, 1957:2). To recognize Marxism as a self-sufficient system which denied self-criticism and self-evaluation, in their opinion, was exemplified in Stalinism where any opposition was considered counter-revolutionary and theory was put above people. Thompson and Saville, however, intended to recover the humanistic core of Marxism where man, and not ideology or theory was in the centre.

Thompson and Saville gave recognition, nevertheless, to the positive influence of the British Communist Party which, despite "all its confusion, its mixed motives, its moral amnesia and doctrinal arrogance", was yet very influential in carrying out humanistic aspirations in the Britain of the 1930's and early 40's. They wrote that the Communist Party of Great Britain stimulated association and

organizational formations within industrial and professional workers in those years (Thompson, 1959:8).

Continuing this appraisal in the first issue of the New Reasoner, Thompson wrote a detailed analysis of Stalinism and Socialist Humanism. He defined Stalinism as a system which was unable to explain the question of agency, and criticized the 'disease of orthodoxy' and 'imposition of ideology upon reality'. Stalinism undermined the reality of the opposition in Russia by labelling them counter-revolutionary whenever they would not fit into Stalinist ideology. Stalinism, therefore, was an ideology divorced from humanity, a mechanical idealism in which men and women were ignored. In dealing with these issues, Thompson still perceived Marxism as being relevant to the British working class. His studies of the British working class and the self-activity of the Hungarian and Polish people. All this was at the basis of his call for a Humanist Socialism. He rejected Stalinism as being an over-simplified analysis which based its studies on "economic causations" and belittled the role of "men's ideas and moral attitudes in the making of history" (Thompson, 1957:108). Instead of imposing an ideology upon working class activities, Thompson called for a "return to man" - from an abstracted view of man to real man. This, he called the content of Socialist Humanism where it is humanist because it puts "real men and women at the centre of socialist theory" and it is socialist because it "re-affirms

the revolutionary perspectives of Communism" (Thompson, 1957:109).

Relying on his experience with the British Communist Party and his understanding of working class self-activity, Thompson warned us that we should think less in terms of theory and more in terms of the process of change. That is, theories should be more flexible to be able to explain the social process. Thinking merely of abstract principles loses sight of the importance of man's role in changing his environment and in affecting the social process.

III. New Left Review

The movement against Stalinism which aimed to rehabilitate the humanist core of Marxism in Britain was called the New Left. The goals and responsibilities of the New Left were seen in protesting the Cold War and in the pursuit of an empirical critique of Stalinism. In their internationalist perspective they aimed to recover the "common aims and principles" of the left Socialist in the West, and the dissident Communist in the East. Thompson wrote that this internationalism advocated the "triumph of the common people" (Thompson, 1959:7-11).

After two years of publication, the New Reasoner merged with another journal called the Universities and Left Review, a bi-monthly published by Oxford students which was formed after the events in Budapest and Suez. Financial

problems and a common interest in a Socialist humanist future and in critiquing capitalist culture were the basic reasons for this joining of forces. In addition, common concern was expressed over trade unions and international issues.

Thompson saw in this amalgamation the prospect of widening the New Left's international influence and expressing their solidarity with the Communist dissidents around the world. The Cold War and its international nature came as a facilitating factor for achieving this goal.

The joint publication was called the New Left Review and had its first issue in January, 1960. The first issue started with this paragraph by William Morris:

"It is a new Society that we are working to realize, not a cleaning up of our present tyrannical muddle into an improved, smoothly-working form of that same order, a mass of dull and useless people organized into classes amidst which the antagonism should be moderated and veiled so that they should act as checks on each other for the insurance of the stability of the system" (Thompson, 1960:1-3).

The writers aimed to "meet people where they are" and to "develop discontent". In other words, they hoped to bring about a dialogue between intellectuals and people where the learning would take place on both parts. There was an urgency felt among people in the New Left Review that a poverty of ideas existed in the Labour Movement and that the dialogue between the intellectuals and workers should be achieved in order to overcome this shortcoming. There was a hope for a marriage between "theoretical analysis" and the

"moral principle of Socialist Humanism" (Thompson, 1960:2).

In his first article in the New Left Review called "At the Point of Production", Thompson argued against two perceptions: (1) that the real exploitation was only to be found in the production process and (2) that to fight for a socialist society only the economic basis of exploitation should be eradicated. It was these trends of thought which Thompson opposed that became the Review's basic ideology. Replacing the editor in chief of the review with Perry Anderson, facilitated this shift in direction. Thompson said later that what they hoped to achieve with Anderson was to "regenerate the Review" and to "recuperate" their "squandered intellect and resources". What was unexpected was that the founders of the Review would be the first to be replaced (Thompson, 1973: 9).

In addition, Thompson and his associates were involved in demonstrations, Left Club lectures, fund-raising, and consequently intended to bring the experiences of men and women to the Review. They were involved with the issues they felt needed urgent attention and had forgotten their "responsibilities as an intellectual workman" (Thompson, 1973:9).

Once Anderson was in the editorial staff, gradually all the so-called uneconomic and socio-cultural issues in the Review were stopped and replaced by more "rigorous" Marxist material. Over time, the Review lost its relevance to the

community centres, the Left Clubs, the Book Centre, and finally they were closed down. Their international affiliations and contacts became redundant and eventually the only one remaining of the various clubs and community meetings was a literary discussion group that met in a London Pub (Sedgwick, 1976:134). Thompson described these changes in a recent interview as "expressive activity" replaced by "open political activity". In other words, the contact with working class and their struggles was lost. In effect the experience of men and women were not reflected in their analysis and it led to increasingly theoretical work. It was this policy that gave way to a movement which did not take part in strikes, demonstrations or any political activity.

Nevertheless, the working class and its experience never left the centre of Thompson's works. In "Out of Apathy", he once again established this focus. He rejected the belief that material prosperity for Britain's working class would result in its loss of revolutionary potential. On the contrary, he argued that "once we have crossed the threshold of absolute deprivation...the high powered salesmanship of an acquisitive society tends to aggravate, not to diminish, material discontent" (Thompson, 1960:5). This explanation brings to the fore the fact that Thompson's idea of exploitation is not merely material. People do not revolt for a 'list of things' but they want to change themselves as men and women and change the society. People

are "moral and intellectual" beings who do not salivate like Pavlov's dog, when hearing bells. They may be given things, but they would still feel dissatisfied. It is true that they want to free themselves from "servitude to things" but they also want to change what brings about this servitude (Thompson, 1958:101).

It was Thompson's concern with this kind of Socialism which gave him incentives to write his essays and reject the kind of Marxism that was "theological", "self-sufficient" and ignored the basic starting point - man. This Marxism became abstract and irrelevant to the experience of people. It was his concern with this issue that motivated him to write a book which examined a great number of issues in Labour history.

The Making of the English Working Class was a response to the above type of Marxism and embraced a "two-sided theoretical polemic". It argued against the political economy of Adam Smith which proposed that "steam power plus the factory system equals working class", it also argued against reducing everything to economic relations (Marho, 1976:7). This book defined class as a historical phenomena and class consciousness as not only arising out of economic exploitation but also out of the cultural ways people handled their class situations.

It was his way of dealing with class which enraged the rigorous Marxists and those who merely dealt with the

economic and static notions of class and class consciousness. He was reluctant to form a "law" of history where every movement was to be categorized and corresponded to its specific form of relations of production. Thompson lost his position in the New Left Review but this did not minimize his influence in Marxist historical work.

In 1966, he joined Raymond Williams and others, such as Stuart Hall, and contributed to the writing of the May Day Manifesto where they re-stated the content of Socialism which had been "bypassed" and "deflected". They perceived Socialism as a humanist alternative where man's life and activities became central. There were also a number of policies set in the Manifesto, such as: support for local militant leaders, and the "internal union democracy". There was also a call for the Left to develop a Socialist National Plan with various detailed proposals for defence against Imperialism as a many-faceted system. The call for a co-operation of different radical and Leftist groups was to create an active New Left which would play a role as a "catalyst". The Manifesto group warned the public that the capitalist social system could only survive if there was a "separation of issues and fragmentation of consciousness". If this fragmentation and fight for issues on different fronts persisted among the Leftist groups, their fights would become ineffective. However, the Manifesto called for a co-operation and ruled out any simple idea of a centralized New

operation and ruled out any simple idea of a centralized New Left.

In addition, the group had to become "at once contemporary in experience, educated in method, democratic in organization and strong in action" (Williams, 1968:187-189).

Another Milestone in Thompson's work was definitely "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism" written in 1967. Here he discussed how by the middle of eighteenth century in England, a new concept of time gradually developed. A task-oriented sense of time based on an irregular rhythm of different tasks performed by a labourer was changed into a timed and regular rhythm of performing tasks. Prior to this transformation there did not seem to be a separation between "work" and "life". But later this distinction was made by Capitalists through the division of labour, appointing supervisors, using fines, bells, money incentives, and the suppression of fairs and sports. This imposition, nevertheless, was resisted and protested by labourers and peasants, where they "clung tenaciously to their customary wakes and feasts, and may even have enlarged them both in vigour and extent" (Thompson, 1967:76). Thompson also discussed how the idea of time-thrift was encouraged by preachers and was emphasized and imposed by capitalists. Above all, he demonstrated how this imposition provoked people's resistance and protest which was expressed by their adherence to customs and fairs. He showed how this

new concept changed the way people lived and how work became rationalized.

Thompson never overlooked the working class all through his work and in The Poverty of Theory he thoroughly analysed of the type of Marxism that ignored this issue, namely the Marxist Structuralism of Louis Althusser. Althusser believed that Marx only started to deal with the real world in Capital, while prior to this work Marx had only dealt with "philosophical trivialities". As a consequence of this, Althusser studied man as he behaved within the determinant forms of historical existence of the social relations of production (Althusser, 1975:95). Thompson argued against the Marxism of Althusser which saw people as merely vectors of the social structure and overlooked the crucial relationship between "social being and social consciousness which gives rise to experience" (Thompson, 1978:33). He emphasized the importance of experience of day to day life in the formation of class consciousness. Analysing class as a "structured process", Thompson perceived of the unfolding potentials of people within the structural limitations of the social system. Class consciousness is always in the process of formation based on a history of the experience of the class members.

The unfolding potentials of people, Thompson wrote, is essential in understanding class consciousness and finally history. Our knowledge of this formation takes a special

form where this knowledge means "something now and another thing tomorrow" (Thompson, 1978:53). Even though historical facts remain the same, their meaning to us differ from one time to the other. The historical knowledge of a historian, therefore, is approximate since the potentials of man is constantly being realized.

In his letter to L. Kolakowski, the Polish Marxist, Thompson tackled once again the subject of historical knowledge. To him historical knowledge was approximate and "relative to that point in history in which the observer is situated, but that this does not mean that it is fictitious" (Thompson, 1973:51). History is a continuum stretching from past to present and the formation of class and class consciousness is not possible at one single point in time without considering its process of becoming.

IV. European Nuclear Disarmament

Thompson has seen the increasing urgency of an issue in which socialists could contribute and so has abandoned his historical writing and research to engage in a "central role in the creation of a continental movement of European Nuclear Disarmament..." (Palmer, 1981:7). With the rising possibility of nuclear war, Thompson has become an advocate of nuclear disarmament. The bomb, Thompson believed, is like an image of man's whole predicament; it represents two contradictory elements: man's life and death. It signifies "total destruction or human mastery over human history"

(Thompson, 1957:143). This mastery would save all.

In the late 1950's,, Thompson and others concerned with this vital issue, came to form the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament which called for a unilateral or "active neutrality" of Britain in a disarmament process. The Campaign contributed to the first Test Ban Treaty signed by the United States, Russia, Britain and more than one hundred governments with the exception of France and China. This treaty banned nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, outer space and underwater, but allowed underground testing. Thompson has not only written but has travelled vastly on behalf of European Nuclear Disarmament - an expanded form of Campgain for Nuclear Disarmament and has discussed the threat of nuclear war and the way to prevent it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated the development of Thompson's political thoughts and activities in relation to his study of the working class and working class consciousness. He has covered a large number of areas in his work from The Making of the English Working Class in the 18th century to work-discipline, law and society, police, juries and European nuclear disarmament. His work is a reflection of what he learned as an activist, historian and writer.

Thompson has relied on historical evidence of working class struggle in his analysis of their self-activity.

Following his understanding of workers activity and the perception of the humanist core of Marxism, he persistently argued against the Stalinist interpretation of Marxism. Thompson's Marxism puts man in the centre of analysis and refutes Stalinism and the Structural Marxism of Althusser because they put theory above and prior to historical evidence of class struggle. He stated that theory should be challengeable by historical evidence or else it loses its relevance to man's life.

Based on his understanding of working class self-activity he wrote that Socialism could not be imposed by intellectuals or party leaders but that it would happen by people and from people. This Socialism would not follow economic reforms but would come as a result of people's participation in the making of Socialism which would alter them en masse.

Thompson was enraged by the socialist intellectuals who treated the working class as ignorant victims who should be guided to revolt for socialism. On the other hand, he also believed that socialist intellectuals who are merely observers give in to their "intellectual proprieties" instead of being influential in the mainstream of social change. As an activist, Thompson has given priority to a struggle which seems to him expedient. He sees the threat of a nuclear war as real and during the last few years this issue has obtained his almost exclusive attention. This engagement also comes

about as a result of Thompson's understanding of the development of history and man's ability to change the social system and historical process.

**CHAPTER THREE: WHAT IS CLASS AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THOMPSON'S WORKS**

- I. Class as a Structured Process
- II. Class as a Historical Process
- III. Class Consciousness
- IV. Socialist Revolution

I. Class as a Structured Process

Thompson stated that "real men and women (should be) at the centre of socialist theory and aspiration" (Thompson, 1957: 109). When man is the focal point in the study of social structure, then his needs, his likes and dislikes, beliefs and customs become central. Thompson's call to put man in the centre of socialist theory did not arise from intellectual contemplation, but was experienced by Thompson in his activity during the Popular Front against Fascism, in the anti-Cold War, and the European Nuclear Disarmament movement.

Thompson's perceived-experience of these events helped him form his ideas about the centrality of man in socialist theory. In this theory, the needs of man are the basis for evaluating the economic, political and social structure (Thompson, 1957:91). Consequently, if the social system is not reflective of man's needs and desires, it is the system that has to change to meet these needs.

If the starting point is not man but axioms, principles or theories, then it may be taken for granted that these abstractions are supposed to be the creative force in the social structure. In addition, it may seem that these abstractions reproduce and regenerate themselves while man's role in social change is minimized. One such perspective is

Structuralist Marxism, which Thompson fervently criticized. Louis Althusser, the French Marxist, and the most prominent advocate of Structuralist Marxism, wrote that history is without a subject but it has a "motor" which is class struggle (Althusser, 1975:51). That "classes are functions of the process of production as a whole. They are not its subjects, on the contrary, they are determined by its form" (Althusser, 1979: 267). That is, Althusser recognized the class struggle as the motor of history and defined classes as being passively influenced by the process of production. Therefore, classes do not signify active, conscious people and class struggle and therefore does not embody the activity of people.

Thompson located man at the centre of his analysis and defined class not as a structure or a category but as "something which in fact happens in human relationships". (Thompson; 1968:1). People do not form a class because they think they belong to that class or because of their position in the social structure, as lower classes, middle classes, etc. Both ways of perceiving or class are oversimplified explanations ignoring that even though man is the subject of history, his activities are conditioned by objective circumstances. Thompson, however, wrote of two aspects of class, one was class situation and the other was class formation. Class situation was basically an objective look at class; that is, when the mode of production "distributes"

people in certain objective circumstances. Class formation is the development of class consciousness through class struggle (Thompson, 1978: 148-151).

In Thompson's analysis, class situation conditions class formation and there is a dialectical relationship involved. These two dimensions of class, therefore, explore subjective as well as objective aspects of class definition. Consequently, class formation is not determined by economic situation but rather it is influenced by a great number of factors.

An example of such an analysis is Thompson's chapter on "Exploitation" in The Making of the English Working Class where he wrote that in England "cotton was certainly the pace-making industry of the Industrial Revolution and the cotton mill was the pre-eminent model for the factory system" (Thompson 1968:211). Yet, we should not assume any "automatic, or over-direct, correspondence between the dynamic of economic growth and the dynamic of social or cultural life". And that "the making of the working class is a fact of political and cultural, as much as of economic history" (Thompson, 1968:211). In other words, the economic situation does not automatically determine all other aspects of the life process but it merely conditions it.

One important characteristic of the Humanist Marxism of Thompson is that the base and the superstructure do not mechanically co-exist each upon the other but they are inter-

related and there is no causal, one way relationship. The "collapse" of all human activities into "economic terms" can "happen only on paper and not in history" (Thompson, 1978:98).

In his analysis of class formation, Thompson wrote of the cultural ways people use to handle their class situation. One instance of class formation in England may be exemplified in Thompson's analysis of late eighteenth century England's transition from a task-oriented to a work-time concept. He found that this transition affected British culture and people resisted this imposed process emphasizing the importance of their customary feasts and leisure time. The working class handled its class situation by resorting to the cultural ways available to it. Besides, this example demonstrated that culture was not merely a separate entity, mechanically based on the relations of production. This culture was influenced by the relations of production and, in turn, influenced the relations of production. Furthermore, through this struggle people came to see themselves as a class and they saw their interests were opposed to other classes.

Thompson's analysis of class embodies two opposing aspects: one is the subjective and the other is the objective nature of class. In other words, it was both through the way people came to handle the objective situation, and the struggle which arises from this that class

was formed. Thompson wrote that "class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences...feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different (and usually opposed to) theirs" (Thompson, 1963:10).

II. Class as a Historical Process

Thompson analysed class as a historical process. This way of perceiving class, obviously rejects the notion of class as a static category (Thompson, 1978:147). When class is treated ahistorically it is easier to study. An ahistorical notion of class finds it easy to categorize people in various classes because they hold more or less immutable characteristics. The static notion of class is that classes exist prior to class struggle (Thompson, 1978:149). That is, the static understanding of class is devoid of class struggle and is merely the notion of class in one particular time in history.

On the other hand, Thompson sees class struggle as prior and essential to class formation and the way to study this process is historically. This type of study shows that "people have repeatedly behaved in class ways" and that "these historical events disclose regularities of response to analogous situation" (Thompson, 1978:149). In studying these regularities, Thompson wrote that we will be able to form a "general theory of class and class formation." But this

theory can not come prior to the historical process and has to be adjusted to it. Thompson wrote that this theory is merely an analytical tool which helps to explain and understand working class struggle.

Althusser, on the contrary, wrote that "Marxist theory is produced by a specific theoretical practice, outside the proletariat." (Althusser, 1968:141). In other words, whereas for Thompson, Marxist theory has practical implications, for Althusser it is merely a "theoretical practice" devoid of the historical struggle of proletariat.

Thompson perceived theories, in general, challengeable by historical evidence and Marx's theory as no exception. On the other hand, Althusser wrote of history as being "...reshaped and changed in its existence." (Althusser, 1968:142). In other words, history is not based on historical evidence but on theoretical shaping and reshaping which may not have to have practical or historical implications.

When dealing with abstracted analysis, Thompson relied on historical evidence and the practical implications of theories. So, Thompson's analysis was definitely a Dialectical Materialist one because he studied class and class formation as a result of class struggle between opposing classes.

However, all of these interactions do not necessarily follow a pre-fabricated model of class and class struggle

simply because of the everchanging objective situation. Thompson wrote that "social contradiction and tensions have a way of working themselves out, not in neat predictable ways but through whatever forms are available. People make use of whatever means history has given to them to use." (Thompson, 1976:135). It is because of this constant change of the possible ways in which class struggle can take place that a historical study of class formation is necessary.

In his analysis of class formation of the eighteenth century English working class, for instance, Thompson wrote of various ways and strategies taken up by them to resist capitalism. The working people of the late 1830's adhered to voting and parliamentary routes as a "new way of reaching out...for social control over their conditions of life and labour." (Thompson, 1963:805 & 913). This route was taken after the defeats of the early 1830's of the formation of unions to fight the harsh advancement of the Industrial Revolution. Even though workers were not successful in voting their representatives in, they tried all available means to obtain a greater degree of control. Thompson also used this method of analysis in his study of the formation of class consciousness.

III. Class Consciousness

Thompson, like Marx before him, has man in the centre of his analyses and does not have a pre-fabricated model of working class consciousness and what form it "ought" to take.

Contrary to Thompson, some Marxists have a definite and inflexible model of what constitutes class consciousness so if the working class does not exhibit the expected class consciousness, then they have a "false consciousness". For instance, Althusser wrote that the "fusion of the Workers' Movement and Marxist theory is the greatest event in the history of class societies." (Althusser, 1977:164-5). On the other hand, Thompson rejected the concept of "false consciousness". He wrote that "conscious human beings whose consciousness is employed in every act of labour" cannot exist "independently of their consciousness." (Thompson, 1957:134).

Human labour, as Marx wrote before Thompson, distinguishes man from animal. That is, in his labour man contemplates and plans the process and mode of production. That is, man's life and labour are not separated from his thinking. This unity of thinking and being explains the importance of working class everyday life experience in the development of its consciousness. Class consciousness therefore does not have to be injected into the working class by intellectuals, or parties as Althusser suggested but this consciousness arises from the working class itself. The basis of this consciousness is in the experience of men and women in their life process. In a holistic analysis of class consciousness, not only economic, political, cultural and

historical factors but also the day to day experience of man in handling his life situation under capitalism should be considered.

According to Thompson, there is no prepared model of what is a true or false class consciousness. Also, there is no "truer" form of class consciousness. It is simply that people make choices to behave one way or another based on the means available and what is perceived to be effective. In Thompson's work, "the so-called perfect or partial forms of popular consciousness", are considered as "authentic expectations of class and class struggle." (Wood, 1982:69).

In a holistic approach to class consciousness, Thompson studied the influence of the objective and subjective upon each other. He wrote that "imaginative and intellectual faculties are not confined to a superstructure and erected upon a base of things, but that they are implicit in the creative act of labour which makes man, man." (Thompson, 1957:131). One of the central issues in the Humanism of Thompson is precisely this way of understanding base and superstructure in which they do not mechanically coexist but interact.

It is this view of social structure by Thompson which arise from to the fact that people's response to exploitation and alienation takes many forms. In other words, people's response is not merely to economic exploitation but in relation to the different aspects of their lives such as the

social, political and religious realms. The interconnections of all of these aspects of life explains why workers response takes different forms.

Furthermore, working class struggle is fought over various issues at different times in history. For instance, on the moral economy of the eighteenth century English poor, Thompson wrote that they protested the price of bread which was their main subsistence. The poor demanded a "just price" which they considered morally as their right. They considered it as morally wrong that some people should make profit out of other's life subsistence. This morality was widely accepted by people at that time and seemed an effective tool for their demand (Thompson, 1971:77-80).

Another example is Luddism or machine-breaking in eighteenth century England. Based on "the tradition of the just price and the fair wage", weavers, hosiers etc., "could see no natural law by which one man or a few men, could engage in practices which brought manifest injury to their fellows." Machines were symbols of these unnatural and immoral practices. Machine breaking or Luddism, Thompson wrote, was not just a moment of confrontation and "transitional conflict". But this movement relied on a host of customs and traditions and tended to "revive ancient rights". Besides, Thompson wrote, machine breaking was not only a phenomenon of this period in history but it had a longer history: from the eighteenth century and first half

of the 19th century whenever there was the "destruction of materials, looms...robbing or firing of houses or property of unpopular employers" (Thompson, 1963:598-604).

As was demonstrated, Thompson wrote how people relied on their cultural values in their class struggle. In addition, working people had chosen the avenues available to fight their struggle in ways which they perceived as being most effective at that time.

Thompson's understanding of class and class consciousness as a historical process recognized time as a vital factor. He suggested that only when history would work itself out that we would know how and why certain forms of class opposition had developed and not others. The arguments which perceive the working class lacking a revolutionary potential and considering them bourgeoisified, are rejected by Thompson partly because they embody an ahistorical understanding of class and suggest that demands for better wages and working conditions are basically non-revolutionary. However, Thompson studying working class consciousness as a historical process, believed that the working class struggled for what they needed and perceived as their more immediate needs. All the same, workers remained alienated in relation to their labour and life even though there may be some improvement in their working condition or their wages. So long as they have no control over their lives, they will feel alienated and they will continue their class struggle.

Thompson was also critical of those Marxists who always saw the working class at the peak of consciousness. He rejected this understanding of working class consciousness and postulated that the working class goes through ascendant and descendant periods of class formation. Thompson wrote in his study of the English working class that "we forget how long abuses can continue 'unknown' until they are articulated, how people can look at misery and not notice it, until misery itself rebels." So, for instance, "In the eyes of the rich between 1790 and 1830 factory children were 'busy', 'industrious', 'useful'; they were kept out of their parks and orchards, and they were cheap." (Thompson, 1963:377). The misery of the working class during the eighteenth century took time to be articulated and gradually it became more organized, direct action as in machine breaking.

Furthermore, if there seems to be an apparent consensus it is not because the working class is passive but because at that time in history, structural constraints prevent them from exhibiting an immediate active response. Thompson wrote that it is not "safe to assume that any part of...history is altogether dead", that there is this "stored cultural energy" which lies beneath the surface (Thompson, 1972:44). This cultural energy will find various ways to crop up when the means become available. The self-activity of the working class, therefore, is not only dependent on the

"willingness" of the working class, but also on the circumstances which provide them with alternatives in their struggle. Accordingly, a Socialist revolution can and does happen when both subjective and objective conditions are ready.

IV. Socialist Revolution

Thompson wrote that there was not one abstract model of revolution that could explain all kinds of revolutions and there was not merely "one kind of revolution which can be made in any given context." (Thompson 1960:7). Considering the everchanging nature of what could be done at different times and the objective possibilities and limitations which social structure provided, this notion of revolution is self-explanatory. An abstract model does not necessarily correspond with the everchanging reality of the world. Not only do the objective circumstances change but people's conception of these circumstances also change.

Thompson analysed two models of revolution: one was the Evolutionist model and the other was the Cataclysmic model. The Evolutionist model suggested that piece-meal reforms at some point in time will tip off the balance of the capitalist system and Socialism would be achieved. People were merely expected to vote for the party with the right policies. In the Cataclysmic model, "class struggle tends to be thought of as a series of brutal, head-on encounters, not as a conflict of forces, interests, values, priorities,

ideas, taking place ceaselessly in every area of life. Its culmination is seen as being a moment when the opposed classes stand wholly disengaged from each other, confronting each other in naked antagonism, not as the climax to ever closer engagement within existing institutions, demanding the most constructive deployment of skills as well as of force." (Thompson, 1960:6).

Thompson's criticism was that these models of revolution did not consider the importance of the alteration of people in the process of a socialist revolution. To be sure, there is the necessity of a "revolution of content" which recognizes the involvement of people in making this revolution as important. This massive transformation was not possible through piece-meal reforms as Evolutionary theory suggests because that way it was not achieved through the self-activity of the working class but imposed from above as "social policies". In a dialectical sense, by their self-activity, the working class would actually negate what made it a working class and by doing this the whole social structure would be transformed and classes would be abolished. This negation, takes place because man was alienated and has been treated as unreal* in the capitalist system and finally would try to establish himself as real. In becoming real, in fact, man and his needs become central to social structure.

*That is, disregarding the central needs of man.

Thompson wrote that even though the "...form of a revolution may depend upon forms of power, but in the last analysis, its content depends upon the consciousness and will of the people." That "...revolutions do not happen but they have to be made." (Thompson, 1960:7-8). In other words, revolution did not automatically happen because the objective social structure was ready for such a change but also because there comes a time when a revolution became necessary. That is, revolution was the only way the society could change. This revolution, as Marx wrote before Thompson, was crucial because "...the alteration of men on a mass scale...can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution." (Tucker, 1978:95).

In his particular reference to Britain, Thompson considered the possibility of a peaceful revolution. Opposing the cataclysmic model of revolution, he wrote that "it is not the violence of a revolution which decides its extent and consequences, but the maturity and activity of the people. Violence does not make anything more real." (Thompson, 1960:7). The reason for such a possibility in Britain, is that "the socialist potential has been enlarged and socialist forms, however imperfect, have grown up within capitalism" (Thompson, 1960:30).

Thompson, however, did not think it was possible to come up with the exact conditions under which this revolution would take place. Revolution is a historical "process whose

very nature is derived from heightened political consciousness and popular participation". So, "its outcome cannot be predicted with certainty". Only in a practical movement will this political consciousness arise and the breaking point of the capitalist system would develop. In other words, only through the unrelenting pressure by the working class would this breaking point appear (Thompson, 1960:30-31).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown the empirical basis of Thompson's study of class and class consciousness. Man and his needs were central to his studies and based on this he defined class and class consciousness. Class was a structured process which was made by objective situations viewed historically. In this making, Thompson viewed a multitude of factors influencing its development and affecting them in return. Class came from the subjective and objective conditions involved in its making and then did not exist separately from each other. Furthermore, class and class consciousness was formed through practical struggle so that class consciousness was situated chronologically after and not before the class struggle against Capitalism. Thompson, therefore, recognized two aspects of class: one, class situation, as an objective view of class and two, class formation as a subjective aspect of class. But again these

two aspects could not be studied as divorced from each other but as interpenetrating. In addition, he perceived class and class consciousness as a process of formation which went through ascendant and descendant periods that could only be detected in a historical study. Thompson emphasized the importance of the alteration of people on a mass scale which was a necessary process for Socialism. So the experience of men and women and a practical struggle were central issues in Thompson's study of class and class consciousness.

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CHAPTER FOUR: THE SOCIALIST INTELLECTUALS AND THE STUDY OF CLASS

I. Politics of Involvement

- intellectuals as Catalysts

II. Dialectical Process and Dialectical Approach

- exact knowledge vs. approximate knowledge
- objectivity vs. subjectivity

In this chapter, we will take up the study of class and class consciousness using a dialectical materialist framework. We do this using Thompson's work as a guide. As was discussed earlier Thompson had been a political activist and a social historian. His method of analysis and his involvement with workers struggles had assisted him in gaining a better understanding of class and class consciousness.

The first section of this chapter will deal with how he was politically involved and the second section will deal with Dialectical Materialism as a method of analysis in helping us understand class and class consciousness.

I. Politics of Involvement

There is not, Thompson wrote, a "basic antagonism at the place of work, and a series of remoter, more muffled antagonisms in the social or ideological superstructure, which are in some way less real." Because of a widespread alienation felt by all, socialist ideas arise from a wide range of people and are demonstrated on canvas, in poems, at schools as well as on the shop floor (Thompson, 1960:68-69). Intellectuals and workers are both alienated and exploited in the same, though different ways, that is, both are exploited in what they do.

Intellectuals are manipulated in the ideas they promote. Workers do not control their labour nor their lives while at work.

The expression of the alienated man arises from his desires and hopes based on his experience or perceived experience. Socialist intellectuals do not directly experience the problems of the working class so they rely on their perceptions of the way workers feel. Marx and Engels considered the possibility of a section of intellectuals who had contemplated the situation of the oppressed, joining the proletariat in the struggle for Socialism. It is this involvement that Thompson encouraged. He also criticized the lack of "experience of practical struggle" on the part of most intellectuals. This is partly a result of the way the capitalist system operates creating a sharp division between, theory and practice. However, by their involvement, intellectuals "may overcome" the "defacto sociological and intellectual segregation of theory and practice." (Thompson, 1978:184-185).

On the other hand, because of the division and subdivision of labour, everyone specializes in parts of different fields, intellectuals too are not excepted from this structure. It encourages, for instance, the sociologist to be involved with the theoretical rather than practical implications of his work.

Thompson understands that a certain degree of abstraction is inevitable and necessary. He nonetheless insisted that the socialist intellectual cannot deal with abstraction divorced from action. In relating to class and class consciousness there should be a constant reappraisal of abstracted theories based on their relevancy to the practical situation. Consequently, the negative aspect of the dichotomy of theory and practice in society is that intellectuals tend to engage exclusively in theoretical work and deal with issues in an abstracted manner. So, how is the intellectual's involvement with the socialist movement possible?

He did not write about socialist intellectuals as if their class situation in the social structure determined their ability to get involved with the socialist movement. Thompson adhered to the Marxian understanding that not "every historical movement, every political event, every philosophic idea must be directly and exclusively ascribed to economic process." This explains why we have the "coexistence of opposing ideologies among the intellectuals in society" (McLellan, 1971:106)..

Thompson claimed that socialist intellectuals must formulate and circulate ideas through three avenues. First, be a specialist in his own area, a socialist intellectual should work to his best ability in whatever he or she does. Second, by "petitions and communicating his or her ideas

through journals, educational activities, forums and discussion groups." Third, through "educational and cultural activities associated with the socialist movement." (Thompson, 1957:21). These are general guidelines which merely show the type of contribution socialists can make. However, the theoretical aspects of what socialist academics do should not "substitute for more difficult practical engagements." (Thompson, 1978:185).

While Thompson encouraged practical engagements of this sort, he completely rejected the idea that intellectuals should lead the socialist movement. In other words, he opposed the elitism among intellectuals who believed that "their specialized talents are a guarantee of superior work and wisdom." (Thompson, 1978:185). On the other hand, he viewed men and women as being able to change to a libertarian Communism that would emerge from and by people themselves.

Intellectuals as Catalysts:

The most prominent issue in Thompson's work was the recognition of the people's potential to bring about change and it was on the basis of this issue that he also saw the intellectuals not as mere victims of societal circumstances but as having the ability to help change the social structure. In addition to their theoretical responsibility on an academic level, socialist intellectuals have a mediating and facilitating role in realizing Socialism.

Thompson wrote and participated as a facilitating element as a historian and socialist activist. In the recent past, his almost exclusive involvement with the issue of nuclear disarmament, gives us an example of what he feels socialist intellectuals can do. He has given lectures in Europe, Canada, and United States on nuclear disarmament and has written on this issue extensively. He has provided us with the international implications of disarmament; advocating that this movement should form an alliance with the "anti-imperialist and national liberation movements in every part of the world." He has said that this movement was not a class question but as a movement which should embody everyone: "churches, Eurocommunists, labourers, Soviet citizens, East European dissidents...unmediated by...trade unionists." (Thompson, 1980:22-23).

In the area of working class struggle, Thompson dealt with the delicate issue of class self-activity as opposed to class being led by a party or intellectuals. Thompson placed working class self-activity in the centre of his work and criticized viewing the party as the "motor" of class struggle. Thompson's analysis of human oppression in Russia and Eastern Europe is an example of how party ideology can be valued over human needs and values. A centralized institution such as the Communist Party of Great Britain rejected the opposition within the party in 1956. The unity and the monolithic form of the party was emphasized and any

opposition was rejected as were Thompson's and John Saville's by the Communist Party of Great Britain's leadership.

In other words, Thompson stated that the Communist Party of Russia and its satellite parties were institutions "adapted to the needs of an ideological orthodoxy...(that)...inhibits the emergence of any unorthodox ideas, that it must have a source of infallibility of revealed dogma..." (Thompson, 1957:136).

Thompson's understanding of the development of class consciousness as arising out of revolutionary experience, follows Marx's notion that the "alteration of man on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution" and that "this revolution is necessary, ...not because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew." (Tucker, 1978:193). It is exactly this process which cannot be substituted by any imposition from above by a party leadership or any socialist intellectual since only "in practice the breaking point of the capitalist system" will become apparent (Thompson, 1960:30).

In this sense the responsibility of a socialist intellectual was to play the role of a catalyst but no more than that. The intellectual's role as a catalyst was: one, in communicating his understanding of the class struggle with

other academicians, and encouraging them to take action in supporting the struggle for a socialist system; two, in supporting and getting involved with this struggle the intellectual would be able to integrate and formulate his findings based on this practical struggle.

The road map to Socialism may change from one time to another as the interconnected forces in society change constantly. The breaking up of the network of the nuclear economy, Thompson wrote, is now the way socialist intellectuals can be influential. Therefore, British socialists should force Britain out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This would inflict a crucial blow to the British capitalist system. To be able to do this, the socialist intellectual had to look for ways to enlarge and emphasize "points of common interest between miners and white collar workers, technicians and textile workers." (Thompson, 1960:31).

In sum, the socialist intellectuals' role in the socialist movement was to research and support the working class in its struggles. In this process, he would be able to facilitate and maximize the revolutionary potential and self-activity among people. This also meant that this self-activity should and would come from and by people. This self-activity would embody the interests of people and not what the socialist intellectual would consider as their needs and desires.

II. Dialectical Process and Dialectical Approach

In examining the class struggle, Thompson saw Historical and Dialectical Materialism as a useful tool which provided us with a way of understanding the social process in its totality (Thompson, 1978:45). This approach is Dialectical because it adheres to the following framework in analysing social process.

Hegel recognized three stages of cognition: (1) "simple, everyday, common sense, vulgar empiricism, ordinary perception", (2) "Understanding", (3) "Dialectics" (James, 1971:7-8). We experienced our environment when we used our senses, intuition, etc. and then organized our perceptions into categories, this Hegel called Understanding. In Understanding we did not take "objects as common sense" but we labeled or categorized them and by doing this we negated their "immediate common sense aspect". This, even though a necessary stage in cognition, was dangerous when these categories gained permanence and became universal. In other words, we overlooked that these categories were merely to make the subjects and events easier to understand and so we may have taken them as universal categories.

By generalizing in this way, we reduced the subject matter to its category and we ignored the differences that may have existed among them. Understanding negates simple common sense by categorizing and negating its particular characteristics. But its dialectic goes only this far.

Consequently, "Understanding makes determinations and maintains them" but Reason or the Dialectical method "dissolves into nothing the determinations of Understanding" (James, 1971:9-14). The dialectical method or reason is the recognition that the categories of our perceptions are not static but move and it also tells us "how and why they move." It is after this, that dialectical method forms a universal which is different from the universal of Understanding since it does not give it permanence and breaks the categories up as soon as they are made. So Dialectical Reasoning is distinguished from positivist reasoning because the first breaks up categories to make a higher form of generalization, but the latter makes categories and treats categories as permanent.

The basis of Thompson's analysis of class and class consciousness is dialectical and the following two sections in this part of our chapter show this.

Exact Knowledge vs. Approximate Knowledge

Thompson in using a historical perspective in dealing with class and class consciousness recognized that our historical knowledge did not provide us with scientific knowledge as it is used in the natural sciences but rather it provided us with approximate knowledge of the historical process. One reason that this is so, is that Dialectical Materialism deals with general history rather than particularistic histories and therefore is more

universalistic and very extensive. Another more important reason, is the matter of eventuation. This means that all the important and potential factors in the historical process have to first develop in order for us to be able to confirm or refute our hypotheses.

Society is everchanging through contraction and negation and becomes something else. This makes our historical knowledge in reference to class and class consciousness an approximate knowledge.

The negative we perceive today (alienation), tomorrow is positive because it may lead to revolution which negates alienation. Therefore multiple factors wait to become causes in the social process which can only be perceived when they have been given time to develop. This is why historical knowledge, Thompson wrote, is "provisional and incomplete" (Thompson, 1978:39). Our knowledge of class and class consciousness cannot be based on permanent categories and concepts because our subject matter is constantly changing and becoming.

Even though the historical process was not "law" governed, it followed dialectical rules. Thompson called these rules historical logic which meant that there were regularities, patterns or "known and expected ways" in the development of the historical process. To re-emphasize, this expected way was not a "model" but merely a tendency (Thompson, 1973:29). Obviously, the difference between "laws

of history" and "historical logic" was that the latter perceives history as a changing process within which history is studied as a "moment of becoming of all the possible potentials, ascendant and descendant forces." (Thompson, 1978:103).

Since social structure and people interact and change each other, historical processes are always in a moment of becoming. This makes history not an accumulation of discrete histories but an interrelation of the different aspects of human life. Thompson wrote that even though historical events are "unique" and "widely separated in time and place" when considered together a pattern or regularity will appear (Thompson, 1978:84). For instance, Thompson wrote that even though the working class in 1820's England seemed somehow quiet, those years were years of struggle for the freedom of the press and the development of a strong trade union. The 1820's may be called a period of development of intellectual culture (Thompson, 1963:781). So, it was not that the working class lacked class consciousness simply because they struggled for something other than their material needs but that the history of class struggle is a continuous struggle over different types of needs and rights at different times.

Another way of approaching this matter is to look at historical knowledge, as not what thought prescribes but what the qualities of the object of knowledge imposes. In this manner, the goal of history is not to "apply", "test" or

"confirm" a theory but to "explain" and "understand its object, real history." (Thompson, 1978:46). In dialectical terms this means that social and historical processes should be studied in themselves and not as they are represented. It follows that class consciousness should be recognized and understood as arising out of the daily struggle of the class and not as symptomatic of its adherence to a party platform.

In studying the forms in which class struggle happens a dialectician knows that there is an interpenetration of content and form. There are certain forms of class struggle and consciousness which are demonstrated in the example of unions. There can be a contradiction between the interests of the working class and the way trade unions represent these interests when it comes to most radical demands. Another example may be the concept of the party in Thompson's analysis when he perceived the party as an organization which adhered to principles which might have reflected the interests of workers at one point in time but later might come to oppose these same interests. This can be seen in the example of the Communist Party of Great Britain where once it was perceived as not reflecting the interests of its members it was forsaken as a legitimate organization. This dialectical quality in the social and historical process makes our knowledge approximate, so we are constantly demanding new and changing categories and concepts to help us to understand historical, social phenomena. There is another

aspect to Thompson's explanation of this historical knowledge and that is the objectivity and subjectivity argument.

Objectivity vs. Subjectivity

Historical knowledge, Thompson wrote, is not about what thought imposes on the real object but it is about the real object itself. This empirical statement is in fact a dialectical one. The historical process may be perceived differently based on the kinds of questions that are asked, obviously past events remain the same. When a historian chooses to write a "history of discrete aspects of the whole" for instance, a biography or a history of an institution, the history still remains as it is, a unitary whole and the human past would be still a "unitary sum of human behaviour" (Thompson, 1978:47). This unitary whole is purposive human activity through time. This purposiveness Thompson wrote, is in fact the intelligibility and intentionality of the historical process. Once we accept that man acts with planning and contemplation of his situation, then the social process cannot be anything but a unitary sum.

In researching and analysing the historical process there is a certain degree of subjectivity involved. Thompson, therefore, wrote that historical knowledge is to a degree "selective" and is "defined by the questions proposed to the evidence." Historical knowledge is subjective because of the choice of the research topic and the nature of

questions asked (Thompson, 1978:39). This probing obviously is very crucial since facts do not disclose anything by themselves. Furthermore, this evaluation and analysis of the significance of the historical events to the present is a subjective judgement on the part of historians. This Thompson did not view as a shortcoming but one which could be placed under control. Thus, historians should be aware of their biases, tendencies, and theoretical predispositions, in order to enable the facts to speak for themselves (Thompson 1980:8).

In Thompson's analysis, in the historical process and historical knowledge there were subjective and objective factors involved that interpenetrate and have mutual influences and negations on one another. As we discussed previously, historical knowledge was influenced by the set of questions posed to it. Thompson, however, noted that the choice of questions was not irrelevant to the objective situations and if we chose "one set of possibilities among others" in studying the social and historical process, this made our task a value-oriented project. In other words, to consider certain sets of possibilities as important to us for future development was value-oriented. This was not only the historian's choice but what events of the present, presented to us as potentially available.

Finally, the object of historical knowledge was facts which had a "real existence". Historical knowledge as was

discussed, was "provisional and incomplete", "selective", and "limited and defined by the questions proposed...and the concepts informing those questions", and not untrue but true within the limitations mentioned above (Thompson, 1978:40-45).

The subjective side of historical knowledge was as important as the objective aspect of it. So, that the researcher who had self-knowledge and awareness of his tendencies and methods of research, should know not only what he examined but also what he examined it with, were in constant change. For instance, working class self-activity takes different forms in different historical epoches and we cannot resort to one particular form of working class activity as a true demonstration of consciousness. The researcher, thus, should follow an examination of "the object in its changes and the examination of our concepts of that object, watching how both change, doing it consciously, clearly, with knowledge and understanding." (James, 1971: 54).

When a dialectician studies social process he or she considers the totality of the factors which interpenetrate and negate each other. So that when studying the social structure, human activity, which negates and changes it, is considered, or when studying the proletariat, its negator the bourgeoisie is taken into account. This holistic approach is taken by Thompson using both objective and subjective factors involved in shaping class and class consciousness.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed both practical and theoretical implications involved in the study of class. We used Thompson's activities and historical analysis as a guide. Thompson recognized that the capitalist system divided manual from mental work and further subdivided labour in the social structure thus limiting intellectuals only to their specialized fields. Intellectuals, some sceptical about the working class movement, felt alienated and impotent in affecting and changing the social structure. Thompson, however encouraged the involvement of socialist intellectuals in social and political spheres. The important notion of working class self activity was always the focus when Thompson invited intellectual involvement as catalysts in working class struggle. The second section of this chapter discussed the dialectical nature of the historical process and historical knowledge. The appropriate nature of historical knowledge was studied through analysis of the notion of "eventuation" which said there were no laws of development but rather tendencies in the historical process. The holistic nature of the social and historical process embodying both subjective and objective factors obviously required a holistic approach.

Furthermore, a socialist intellectual would have to deal with theory as having practical implications. Even

though the responsibilities in a practical and theoretical sense of socialist intellectuals varies from time to time Thompson perceived that their immediate responsibility lies in getting involved with nuclear disarmament.

CONCLUSION

I. Marxism Revisited

- Humanism
- Working Class Self-Activity

II. Intellectuals' Praxis

In conclusion, highlights of the analysis of Thompson's account of class and class consciousness in this thesis was dealt with in relation to the consequences of this approach for Marxism, for working class studies and for intellectuals' political involvement.

I. Marxism Revisited

a. Humanism

We said Thompson had revealed the humanist core of Marxism which had been ignored by Structuralist Marxism in studying class and class consciousness. This dereification of Marxism was important at a time when man and his needs, desires and struggles were overlooked in the social system that treated him as unimportant or non-existent. So as the social structure of the capitalist system tended to alienate workers from control over their work, a structuralist merely reflected this passive treatment and overlooked the other more important aspect, that is, man's response to this alienation.

Marx wrote that "this sidedness of thinking is only proven in practice", meaning that no matter how divided or subdivided the tasks, the praxis (unity of practice and theory) remains. Furthermore, the objective conditions were themselves a result of reciprocal interactions, both past and present. The past conditions the present in the interaction that goes on between the capitalist and the workers. Nevertheless, the objective situation "is itself conditioned

by the circumstances in which men find themselves, by the productive forces already acquired, by the social forms which exist before they do, which they do not create, which is the product of the preceding generation" (Tucker, 1978:136-137). So, even the objective situations which are at times treated as if they were pre-given and pre-existing were, in Marx's terms, a product of man's historical interaction with others and Nature.

In addition, Marx had class struggle in the centre of his work and discussed how workers themselves provided this central role in history in practical struggle. Thompson has also given this struggle a central position in all of his work, in particular the development of working class consciousness.

Thompson has stated that Marxism was not separated from its Humanism and its Historical and Dialectical Materialism. If it is divorced from these essential characteristics, then what we would have was an ahistorical vulgar materialism which treated categories as having an eternal, universal significance. Marx, in criticizing vulgar materialism, wrote that it does not realize that "social life is essentially practical." (Tucker, 1978:145). So the study of society should start with man and his activity, not with a set of prefabricated categories and expect to fit man's activities in them. Otherwise, we overlook the fact that the categories and concepts are only tools which have to change

with reality.

If for reasons of simplification or statistical manipulation, we have taken a momentary picture of social activities as permanent and representative of the whole process, then our understanding of class is limited. There is a historical logic in Thompson's and Marx's analysis which concentrates on tendencies, in the development of society. On this matter, Marx wrote that it was a mistake to understand "economic categories as eternal and not as historical laws which are only laws for a particular historical development for a definite development of the productive forces" (Tucker, 1978:140). The study of class has to be done not only in its institutional forms of struggle but also in the informal day to day forms that workers invent as a class. What we are trying to clarify here is that the study of the working class has to be done both in its structured, organized forms and its content, as working class self-activity outside the structures of unions and parties. Thompson, as a Marxist has concentrated on experience in practical struggle and its role in the formation of class and class consciousness. Thompson's Humanism, lies in his central attention to man, class and class struggle and the vital role of experience in this struggle.

His insistence on the precedence of class struggle before class consciousness is his emphasis on this "practical

process of development". The development is a conscious reaction of working people to their situation. So his concept of class is different from non-Marxists and some Marxists because he accounts for the human agency in the formation of class and class consciousness. Class embodies this notion of development as a consequence of the practical activity of working people. Even though Thompson realizes the immense powers of the media, the state and the ruling class, he still perceives the working class as not merely recipients but also as reacting to their experiences as effectively as they can using all available means. This response and opposition may take various forms at different times, but this does not make their class consciousness "true" or "false". It is "true" simply because it is a developing process which goes through various stages and we need to study it for a long enough time to know then where their class consciousness is going.

Thompson has challenged the Structuralist Marxists for their short-sightedness in dealing with working class history and the role of man in changing his environs and himself. In other words, by studying the working class, its history and activities, Thompson has re-emphasized the dialectical and humanistic side of Marxism which is too often overlooked. Furthermore, history in Thompson's account is not a set of "dead facts" or a set of theories but is about human action and experience. It is only after such a study

that one can make abstractions about the way the working class behaves - but then we have to remember that these abstractions may later be contradicted by the reality of the working class and its consciousness.

In the study of class, Thompson demonstrated a continuum of class struggle which developed and took various forms where people used cultural means to fight an exploitative system. History cannot be a segmented study of a series of disconnected events because the objective situation (which is also made by man) changes as a result of man's struggle and labour and consequently man changes, and this goes on...

In addition, Thompson wrote of historical eventuation whereby until all the potential in the development of historical process is fully matured the analysis of that process has to be open ended. More specifically, in the case of working class consciousness, Thompson wrote that to say whether they have a "false" or "true" consciousness is a nearsighted evaluation because we merely stop time and evaluate the situation as if class consciousness is not developing anymore. Besides, even though historical events of the past do not alter their meaning and relevance to us they change as time passes because of the fact that we can observe the development of events of the past in relation to the present. For instance, through a historical study of class consciousness in England, Thompson demonstrated how

modern industrial sabotage is similar to, the sabotage during the cottage industry, and to Luddism as a way of opposing the way production was organized and carried on which the workers perceived as traditionally, culturally and morally "unjust". So, he demonstrated how sabotage that may be perceived as reactionary by some has a militant and radical root in the past and was an effective means to struggle against the capitalist organization of production.

b. Working Class Self Activity

Thompson's study of working class activity was based on his understanding of working class history in England and other countries such as Hungary. The Hungarian working class, during the revolution of 1956, formed workers councils (James, 1973:91) This act of the Hungarian working class and the consequent oppressive measures by the Russians led Thompson to oppose the Communist Party. It was this event and his knowledge of working class history which laid the foundation for his understanding of working class self-activity.

Marx saw this self-activity as necessary for the development of consciousness and the liberation of man. The working class and private property are contradictory to each other in the sense that the growth of more private property is based on further expropriation of the working class's labour power which further alienates the working class. Marx wrote,

"Since the fully formed proletariat represents, practically speaking, the completed abstraction from everything human..., since all the living conditions of contemporary society have reached the acme of inhumanity in the living conditions of the proletariat, since in the proletarian man has lost himself, although at the same time he has both acquired a theoretical consciousness of this loss and has been directly forced into indignation against this inhumanity by virtue of an inexorable, utterly unembellishable, absolutely imperious need, that practical expression of necessity ... because of all this the proletariat itself can and must liberate itself." (Tucker, 1978:134)

This was the kind of historical necessity that Thompson refers to as working class self-activity which no party can teach or impose upon workers merely because the crucial way to liberation and Socialism was not through a party but through the practical struggle and practical consciousness of the class. This is because the working class is in the centre of this exploitation and alienation and they are conscious of it in their everyday lives and struggles against it. Working class self-activity is based on an understanding of this everyday, dehumanizing situation.

The unity of being and thinking was the focal point of Thompson's analysis of working class self-activity and consequently, he dealt with the praxis of the working class. It was this praxis that was vital to achieving Socialism. For Thompson, the self-activity of the working class in a practical struggle was the only way to Socialism. Furthermore, it is through this struggle that the breaking point of the capitalist system will develop. That is, it is

through praxis, through experiencing and handling the objective class situation, that the working class will find the means to break up the capitalist system.

II. Intellectuals Praxis

Another aspect to this thesis has been the importance of the socialist intellectual's political involvement in issues in which they can be effective. Their influence, Thompson believed was not one of leadership but one of supporting and facilitating the working class in their struggle. Thompson did not provide a detailed account of his own involvement. However his own experiences with various groups and journals in Britain pointed up some possible ways radical intellectuals would contribute this supporting role.

His involvement in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in the 40's was important and because he taught and learned from a group of workers and labour unionists, it was this close contact with workers and his understanding of their experiences, together with his own education as a radical historian and his knowledge of working class history which were the bases of his written work and activity. He rejected the idea of intellectuals leading the working class. What socialist intellectuals could do on a practical level was to support working class struggles and, on a theoretical level and examine and introduce their experience with working class self activity into their studies of working class.

The socialist intellectual seeing himself in sympathy with the workers cannot merely be a passive observer but one who protests against the exploitative measures of Capitalism. A capitalist society tends to value theoretical speculation about the working classes life situation. So we find some academics coming up with theories about working class attitudes and values. Thompson claims that the separation of theory and practice will persist until socialist intellectuals involve themselves with working class life and struggle.

Thompson was asked in an interview in 1976 whether he wrote The Making of the English Working Class "with immediate political goals or intentions in mind, as an intervention, somewhat veiled, in the current political sense, or did it come from other preoccupations of (his)?" He answered that,

"mediations between any intellectual or artistic work and one's experience and participation in society are never one-to-one; they are never direct. I mean, no painter can paint his political experience like that, and if he tries to do so he paints a poster, which has perhaps a good value as a poster" (Marho, 1978:6)

Noticing this subjectivity, Thompson wrote in another work that what a researcher has to do is to "listen" and give the facts no meaning but let them speak for themselves. What this means is that Thompson believes that the subjective and objective aspects of research do not exist as divorced from each other but that they exist as interconnected and interrelated. However, a good researcher should, as Thompson

wrote, be aware of his or her own biases and pre-dispositions and also the limitations of his or her methodology.

Subjective and objective aspects in both social process and methods of research were dealt with as a unity by Thompson. Based on this unity he wrote that the choices of questions to be asked from a social historical process were not merely subjectively influenced but were also what the events of the present provided us with as potentially important. A dialectical analysis considers the totality and unity of subjective/objective aspects, and positive/negative factors together. It is this total look at history as a process of historical knowledge which Thompson advocated.

No study can be purely objective since the minute one started studying a social process, the researcher was changed and effected by what he studied and what he studied only revealed to the researcher what he had asked of it. In other words, the type of questions asked from a social, historical process already influenced what we found. Even though the historical facts of the past did not change, it was only their relevance and meaning to us that changed based on the kinds of questions we asked.

In an analysis of his work, we have shown Thompson's adherence to a Historical and Dialectical Materialist methodology. Thompson wrote that Historical and Dialectical Materialism gave a holistic view of man and the social historical process. This analytical tool embodied the

process of contradiction, negation and change where concepts, forms and categories were changing with the content of the historical process. So as far as the category of class was concerned, Thompson, as a historian knows that categories are made only to be later changed. Class was both a structure (in its form) and a process (in its content) and one did not exist without the other and so far as we study class we analysed it as a "structured process". In other words, the objective factors as, for instance, economic structure conditioned how a class in process would develop when people interact and come to see themselves and others as belonging to the same class in a subjective way. But inherent in this class situation and class formation was the antagonism between classes where people came to see their common interest as opposed to others. This antagonism was partly from the objective class situation in which people found themselves and the way they handle this antagonism in cultural ways which are available and effective.

Dialectical and Historical Materialism provides us with an approximate knowledge of class and class consciousness simply because it is a holistic view of the social historical process which takes into consideration a host of factors that not only influence class and class consciousness, but also influence each other perpetually. So, Thompson analyzed class and class consciousness as influenced not only by the economic structure but also by political,

social, historical and cultural factors. Therefore, the reason for this approximate knowledge is that the way "social contradictions and tensions" would work themselves out is not by a clear cut, predictable map route but through "whatever forms are...available" (Thompson, 1976,135).

It is only through the "eventuation" of a social historical process that we know how class and class consciousness have come to be formed and what the "tendencies" in their future development are. These tendencies are, in fact, based on the "historical logic" of the social historical process. Historical logic is the dialectical manner in which these processes tend to develop. For instance, the antagonism between the working class and the capitalist may work itself out in different forms but the form it would take is based on what working class considers as effective and available to them. As in the struggle for control over the mode of production, workers consider the means that they consider more effective, (based on their experience with the capitalist) such as sit-ins, sabotage and strikes, etc. Our prediction--if we can use this word in a Thompsonian view--is therefore based on different routes available to workers which we think they would tend to take, not would take or have to take.

The Thompsonian approach has provided an alternative way of analysing class to some Marxist and non-Marxist approaches. For instance sociological theories such as

Functionalism treat class as an abstract entity and see them as functional to the maintenance of the social system. Thompson's approach, on the other hand, is to handle class as arising from the needs, aspirations, similarities and differences that are found in a society and not as abstractions. Conflict theorists such as those that base themselves on Weber's work deal with classes from the perspective of market behaviour. They emphasize behaviour in consumption over behaviour in production. The possibility of struggle arising out of an alienating work life is lost and so is any real basis for class struggle and working class control arising out of this struggle. All these theories have an ahistorical approach even though some have benefited from a Marxian approach to the social system.

Most Marxist perspectives, on class have dealt with class as a structure. This concept of class is not flexible and they see a deterministic relationship between economic structure and the formation of class consciousness; that is they simplify class consciousness down to class situation in the social structure. Thompson's approach treats class as changing and flexible but also as a structured process where economic structure conditions class consciousness in a dialectical manner.

The relatively new field of Social History has been deeply influenced by the Thompsonian approach and has developed rapidly in other countries besides Britain, such as

the United States and Canada. The Thompsonian approach in Canada has embodied or striven to embody the following characteristics: One is that the "study of working class culture is essential to an understanding of worker's control and the conflicts that erupted because of the challenge to that control" (Bercuson, 1981:97). Furthermore, according to this approach class is not only an economic but a cultural phenomena where in its economic aspect class implies the "exploitative relationship between capitalist and worker", and in its cultural aspect, class refers to "beliefs, values, and traditions of the workers". Class is to be considered in its totality, in its economic and cultural aspects (Bercuson, 1981:97).

This total vision of class is not only based on the non-institutionalized but also the institutionalized behaviour of workers within and out of labour unions. Therefore, labour history in Canada incorporates both the history "from bottom up and the study of unions and labour politics" (Kealey, 1981:69). In addition, based on the specific national characteristics of Canada Kealey also recognizes the factors of periodization, region, ethnicity and culture.

Finally, Thompson provides us with a general outline to studying class and class consciousness and their development in economic, political, social and cultural surroundings. It is a Marxism which has revived the

essential and vital aspects of Marx in reference to his humanism and Dialectical Materialism. It also is a general model open to incorporating experience and historical evidence.

Thompson's works are not only a revival of Marxism, but also a call for active participation of academics with the every day life experience of working people and support for their struggle for Socialism.

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